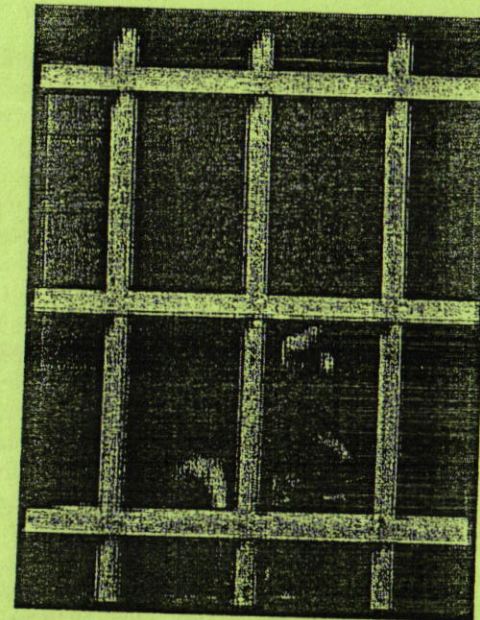


if i know anything at all
it's that a wall is just a wall
and nothing more
it can be broken down
-assata shakur

REFLECTIONS ON WOMEN IN PRISON



by summer thomas and jenn bowman

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why i care about prisons - by jeann bowman

i've been having a hard time lately being on the outside, enjoying the sun, enjoying the freedom to ride my bike, having the freedom to talk and hang out with my friends anytime and in any way that i want to. the other night i was at the Washington State (Un)Corrections Center at Shelton, WA for a weekly seminar i attend with incarcerated students. while i was funning inside from the racism, sexism, and homophobia from the men, i was watching the sun set through concrete blocks. at this point i became ill and wanted to break through those walls, let those men run free and blow up the prison. instead i wrote a poem and had breakdown two hours later.

i'm not really sure what this story has to do with my work in prisons except for the fact that it keeps me in check about the amazingly beautiful things that i take for granted everyday like the sun, my friends, my love, my bike, *everything*. i work in prisons to keep my privileged (as much as a black, working class, activist, woman of size and lesbian can have), theoretical, college educated ass in check. i work in prisons because it's a system that has been set up as the slave system that never ended. The 13th amendment states: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment whereby the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist in the United States." if anyone knows there history, you'll know that this amendment "freed" the slaves but the history of prisons and prisonlabor shows there is a significant correlation between the ending of slavery and the building of more prisons. i mean, really, in a land that is ruled by white supremacy and patriarchy, there will not be freedom for anyone that doesn't fit the great white, rich straight male model. so basically they had to think of a "legal" way to keep enslaving and imprisoning people of color. i work in prisons because 82% of the men that are in there are black and as a black woman i can't ignore them or that number. i can't ignore what i feel is genocide of black people, latino people, the indigenous people that this country was stolen from...and i can't ignore the people that i have met inside, they have changed my life forever and i have learned as much, if not more from them, then at the institution of learning that i attend.

i became interested in prison work after going to a conference in September 98 at Berkeley: critical resistance beyond the prison industrial complex. while i was there i learned the urgency of the problems of the

growing PIC and after seeing 3,000 people there i knew this was a big deal and i knew that i could no longer ignore the people that didn't "exist", the people that society has deemed "deviant" or "criminal." i could not ignore that women on the inside were being raped, shackled to their beds during childbirth, that the majority of these women are in prison from defending themselves against an abusive world, and abusive partner the racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, that creates the inaccessibility and frustration that drives them to create alternative ways to get money, or feed their children, when welfare is slowly getting cut for mothers and their children. All the while welfare for governments is increasing all of the time.

when i went home for winter break i told my mother that i was going to start working in prisons and she said what are you crazy? why would you want to work in there? i was angry at first but then realized that my mother, a white, working class, non-educated woman, was merely reliving the images that she has been force-fed through our right wing media. i tried to explain to her that not all people in prison are evil, rapists, robbers, child molesters. i tried to tell her that because of the institutionalization of racism, sexism, and classism some people have been historically and continuously kept out of jobs, colleges, and other places that could maintain an income that was conducive to their needs. i was frustrated and angry by the end of our conversation but realized that my mother represents so many people that i want to talk to and will end up talking to. kind of like the older white gentleman that asked me about my pin on my jacket, the one that says "alternatives for mother's not jails". he said what does that mean? i said, well it means that women who have children should not have to go to jail. then he said why? and i said because of the racism, sexism, classism that has affected their access to certain institutions. immediately he said i don't buy that, those women committed those crimes, they deserve to be where they are. i thought how nice for you *white man*, i wonder how many times you have had to go to the welfare office, how many times you have been stared at because of the color of your skin, how many times have you been refused a job because of lack of education or not being the right gender, not knowing the right person? by the time i left i was angry, sad, frustrated, and remembering this man is like my mother, needlessly assaulted by the images and history that never gets told from the other side. so here i am ready to tell the other side...i'm ready to rid myself of the fear, are you...?

in solidarity--jenn bowman

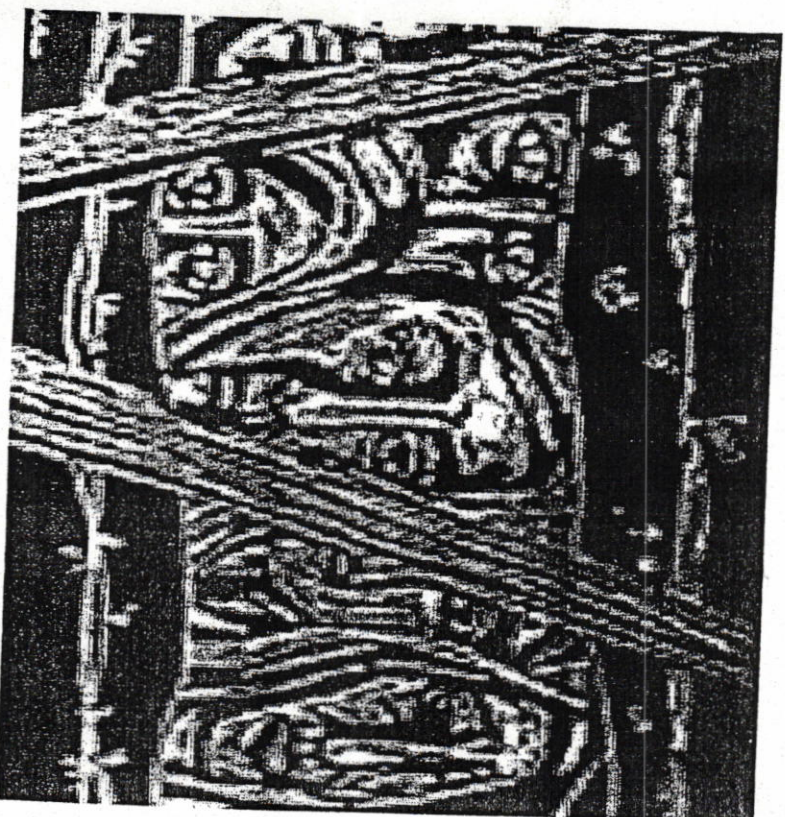
SO WHY DO I WANNA WRITE A ZINE ABOUT WOMEN IN PRISON?

Mass media, the lens of our imperialist corporations and government, would love to have us believe that prisons are here to protect "good" people from "bad" people, and that they are a place for rehabilitation. I am here to offer my own lens-the reality of what I've heard about prisons and what I've seen inside. I have traveled behind bars and looked into the eyes of men, women, and kids who live there. I have seen pain and anger that comes from being treated as lab rats by prison guards while living within the stagnant infested walls of prison. I have listened to young Native, Chicano, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and African American men talk about getting heads slammed into the ground by guards just because of their appearance. I have watched male guards shove orders down women prisoner's throats. I cannot ignore the blatant racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia that lives in highly concentrated forms behind bars. I cannot ignore a system that is set up as Chrystos has said, to "destroy the spirit," not rehabilitate.

There were no prisons before colonizers reached what is known today as the United States, and killed & exploited millions of Native Americans who were already on this land. Now 500 years later, prisons are growing at an incomprehensible rate locking up more *poor* nonwhite people, women and white people than anybody else, while destroying the environment and splitting up communities. I cannot turn my head away.

War never stops in this country, it just changes it's shape and form until we cannot identify it anymore, until we become a part of it without knowing. Political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal writes, "We stand in a city that wages a quiet war against the poor, by the wicked withdrawal of resources from them; it is a quiet war which reveals its battle scars in the fractured, shattered buildings that line ghetto streets; the black captives of this war, shackled and manacled, choke the city's prisons and jails, men and women who are, more often than not, prisoners solely because of their poverty; for the poor can pay no bail; and the poor can ill afford a decent lawyer - thus, prisons become social sinkholes of the poor and rejected, for in this city, poverty is a serious crime." I ask you, reader, to

**aint nothing natural
about being locked up**
-prisoner at wa state corrections
center for women



Amnesty International
<http://www.amnesty-usa.org/>

organizations

**The California Coalition for Women Prisoners
Families With a Future
Legal Services for Prisoners with Children**
100 McAllister Street / San Francisco CA 94102

Prison Activist Resource Center
PO Box 3201 Berkeley CA 94703
phone(510)845-8813

Prison Action Committee
Evergreen State College/Olympia, WA 98505
phone(360)866-6000x6879

The USA made a significant contribution to the development of the international standards and mechanisms of human rights protection. However, it has declined to ratify key human rights treaties, has reserved the right not to implement important provisions of treaties that it has ratified and has refused to permit people within the USA to bring complaints about alleged violations of their human rights to international monitoring bodies.

-Amnesty International

question who goes to prison and why? Why is it that our secretary of state, Madeline Albright, our President, and secretary of defense can command siege warfare by killing millions of people in Iraq with economic sanctions, but never serve a day of time in prison, while a woman defends herself against an abusive partner and ends up serving a lifetime behind bars?!

What you will see in the following pages is only the beginning,, one piece of the puzzle that once put together, reveals a fierce, bloodthirsty and money hungry beast, a beast that will continue to rule unless we all change. I can only speak to my own experiences with prison and prisoners. I can only expose what I've been asked to expose by those who don't have the resources or privileges to do so. I am not a prisoner, I weave in and out of the bars on a weekly basis participating in seminars and workshops. I don't know what it feels like to have male guards in my face every minute of the day or to share a space the size of a bathroom with four people who I don't know. What I do know, though, are faces, stories and truths, and the possibility of exploding the myths that hover over prisons and prisoners.

People ask me what it is that pushes me to do this work: to write about prison, to actively speak out against it, to go inside. I tell them that it is my privilege and struggle; my experiences as a white, working class, queer woman that push me. Yes, my experiences in feeling and learning how oppressive life can be have pushed me, but the experiences of others, the strength I see inside-in prisoners-continues to push me. Hope for a life that isn't so criminalized and institutionalized by laws dictated by fear and ignorance pushes me.

These connections I've made with prisoners, they are the alternatives to prison. I've never learned so much in school as I've learned in prison. I've been challenged to listen closely to unfamiliar experiences, and think and act differently. I challenge you reader, to listen...and to speak with truth.

summer thomas

Who is a criminal and who defines criminality: a historical and contextual analysis by Jenn Bowman

Why Contextualize?

Before we get into the history of women's prisons in the United States it is crucial that we take a few moments to examine and contextualize the white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal foundations of this country that have influenced the way that laws and "criminals" have been defined. These foundations have severely effected the way that women, people of color, immigrants and poor white people have been and still are treated. The results of these foundations have been the institutionalization of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, sizeism and ableism.

Colonization and the invention of a criminal class

Before the onset of white european thieves and murderers, indigenous people lived on this land that we now call the United States of America. In the history books of public schools we learn that Christopher Columbus "discovered" amerikkka and that there were no people here when he came. That's the wrong story. Indigenous people had existed here for (years here) and were living lives that were centered around a holistic communal culture, one that both lived off of the land and gave back to it. When the white european colonizers came to this country they viewed these practices as "unnatural" and "uncivilized" according to their cultural practices, practices based on a religion that was patriarchal, sexist, and racist. Indigenous governments and laws existed previous to the colonizers arrival to this country. The colonizers came here with capitalist notions in their heads, they saw land and in that they saw wealth. In order for them to appropriate this land they needed to lie, steal and cheat it from the indigenous people that were already here. Along with lying and stealing they massacred, raped, and murdered millions of indigenous people. They also needed to break down the cultural traditions of indigenous people. In her book Inventing the Savage Luana Ross states:

One of the main motives of colonialism is economic exploitation and cultural suppression which almost invariably accompanies colonialism. Cultural suppres-

Resources

books

Nonfiction

Partial Justice Nicole Rafter

Criminal Injustice ed. Elihu Rosenblatt

Women In Prison Kathryn Watterson

Inventing the Savage, Luana Ross

Women, Prison, and Crime Joycelyn Pollock- Byrne

The American Indian In the White Man's Prison, ed. Little Rock Reed

The Farm, Andi Rierden

Poetry, Fiction, Autobiography

Fire Power, Not Vanishing, Fugitive Colors,
Chrystos

Unsettling America, ed. Maria Mazziotti Gillan & Jennifer Gillan

Assata An Autobiography, Assata Shakur

Voices Behind the Wall, ed. John Farrell

Aliens At the Border

web pages:

Prison Activist Resource Center
<http://www.prisonactivist.org>

Native American Prison Resource Page
http://www.planet-peace.org/prison_issues/napp.html

November Coalition For Peace
<http://www.november.org>

Due to lack of time, resources, and energy, we didn't include a lot of things in this zine that are connected to the prison system. One huge obstacle in writing the history of women in prison was the narrow-mindedness of my resources. Most information suffered from the inability to provide a perspective that spanned beyond a black/white lens. For this reason, we could not represent all non-white people who have been severely affected by prison. Silencing of queer women and transgender prisoners made it difficult to find any resources that uncovered their history and struggle inside barred gates. Throughout the history of prison a high proportion of queer women have been locked up and continue to be, revealing the extreme homophobia in our society, and sending the message that queerness needs to be locked up and hidden from the larger population. A high proportion of immigrants have been and continue to be locked up. A prisoner just reported that at the Women's Corrections Center in Washington, Chicana, Latina, and Mexican prisoners who are not citizens of the United States are being transported to border towns like El Paso, TX, dropped off without any guidance and denied the \$40 that prisoners are given when they are let go. This is just in Washington...there is plenty of information on the incarceration of immigrants and the harsh reality of INS detention centers across the United States...you just have to be willing to seek it out. We also didn't include any discussion about the rising imprisonment of juveniles. The United States is number one in the world for locking up kids.

These are only some of the issues that we couldn't cover in the zine but something to realize is that the prison system is part of a larger political economic structure that branches out into every aspect of our lives. Education, psychiatric wards, law enforcement, welfare, labor, war, and domestic violence are all connected to the growing prison crisis. The loss of welfare rights, the lack of an adequate education, low wages (just to name a few) are all connected to the rise in the prison population. Think, respond and ACT.

sion is a legal process that involves deculturation-eradication of the indigenous people's original traditions-followed by the ideas of the dominators so the colonized may themselves assist the colonial project. (12)

As a result of colonization indigenous people lost many of their traditions, were removed from their homes and were deemed "lawless" people all because of the foreign cultural traditions that were shoved down their throats. This "lawlessness" essentially created what the white euro-colonizers saw as a "criminal". The people that were acting out and rebelling the colonizers laws were punished, instead of the colonizers. To think of colonization only in the terms of conquest leaves out the many people that resisted the forced loss of tradition and culture. History as told through the eyes of white supremacy, which is linked with patriarchy, often leaves out the resistance of indigenous peoples, the many slave revolts of African people, the strikes and protests of workers and many other forms of resistance. I believe that these events are left out on purpose to leave people feeling helpless, to not build off of the many resisters that came before us. It is those that rebelled who became the criminals, if we examine history and look at who is also in prison today, we will see that there are still resisters; Mumia Abu Jamal, Leonard Peltier, the Puerto Rican political prisoners who are fighting for the independence of their land, the many black, white, latino, asian women, men and young people fighting against the racism, sexism, classism, homophobia that was instilled with the onslaught of colonization.

There were laws created to suit the "savage" notion that was created for native people, oftentimes they were arrested for just wailing around, on their own land. Again, the colonizers had to think up and create reasons and laws in order to make indigenous people think less of themselves and to get the land for future investments (like stealing africans and using them as slaves). Ross states:

Indigenous people's land and other resources were desired by ethnocentric europeans and later euro-americans, who expressed their cultural superiority as the justification for the expropriation of native lands. Natives were regarded as "savages" legitimizing the

WORKING TOWARDS A HISTORY OF WOMEN IN PRISON....
summer thomas

Only By the Law of White Supremacy

Prisons were created for people who broke laws. The laws that ruled society were primarily created by white Western European Christian-Puritans who immigrated to this land, enslaved, killed, and forcefully relocated native populations while enslaving, buying, and selling large African populations. The people who "broke" the laws were primarily poor non-white and white immigrants, African American and Native populations. The division between who made the laws, and suffered from them is a division based on privilege and oppression. It is also a division based on white supremacy and imperialist notions that it is legitimate for a certain experience(white, wealthy, male, Christian/Puritan, heterosexual) to dominate the experiences of people from other cultures, races, genders, and classes. This idea was legitimated by colonizers with illusions that Native and African people were "savage" and incapable of controlling the direction of their own lives. In her book *Inventing the Savage*, Luana Ross powerfully draws attention to the reality of cultural suppression as "a legal process that involves the deculturation-eradication of the indigenous people's original traditions--followed by indoctrination in the ideas of the dominators so the colonized may themselves assist the colonial project."

It is significant within the context of the prison system to understand that different societies of people who already lived here or were forced here, already had systems of governance that were annihilated. If the prison system resembled a system of justice, it would punish the colonizers for their crimes committed, not the people who are actually being incarcerated.

To write about the history of prison, and particularly for women in the United States is to write about the history of Colonialism; slavery, mass genocide of Native Americans, labor exploitation of poor non-white and white immigrants, queer bashing, rape

I personally never paid much attention to legal stuff. All I did was give it a listen to if & as always some politician was showing their asshole selves I'd cuss back at the tv or bring it up with some one at work, some one. But we voted them in so let that be a lesson.

So no matter it was but for the moment & I went on with my day. Aren't there always more important things then politics to worry about? Like what'll I wear Friday night? Those shoes won't work and do I carry a spare pair of panty hose. Its right up there with that lipstick & the compact.

So while I lived your world, while living with prisoners around me(and what town doesn't have a jail) not per say, but knew they existed, I lived without its impact for I was not one of "them".

Is that what you think? Me, I can tell you, is still not one of "them", yet your only a lie away to become one too. Live life as if your immuned. Act as if your untouchable. Be careful about scoffing? Yeah, I went there too. Even fingered them all, who'd dare try?

Well try they did and unless you're a "somebody" you got a chance. Most somebodies have money. My money ran out. Me against them, that system that couldn't touch me. Yeah right. Reduced to a 8x11 room? My closet was bigger than that! Stripped from self and now treated with humiliation and I am now that which is upon paper they deemed true. It's ironic that I probably voted for them!

Once courts said and one that is it. No half time for court strategies. Games over, lights off and so is the light of day, and the life, the who you were. Think on that and don't tell me it can't happen to you. All that you are is no more. Kaput! No, not all "somebodies" get off or get reduced sentences. Yet you know for yourself how close you to becoming one of us...Still think your immuned,

children back and to be responsible to them and for them. Give her an opportunity to show society and the world in general that she can be trusted to run her own life and raise her own children. Just give her a chance.

-Kathleen Boyd #765272

The time I have spent here in prison has really opened my eyes and enlightened me on a lot of things. I am 43 years old and am here for a delivery charge that finally caught up with me from '96. I guess I have lived a sheltered life, because it is still hard for me to believe some of the things these women have done and I have been incarcerated for 11 months. I get out on St. Patrick's Day 2000. Some women keep coming back here over and over. It is hard to believe that they do the same thing over and over. Personally, I will never come back. This place, if you take advantage of all the programs they have to offer can really make a change in your life 20 years ago, I went to college for 2 years and then started Bartending and getting into drugs(Cocaine, mostly) and for the past 20 years I have partied. Now it is time to make something out of myself. I have takin' three college courses from Tacoma Community College and 1 course from the University of Washington program. Now I am in a work program with a great mission to help people. *I work for Pioneer Industries in Seattle(we mostly make parts for Boeing).* I take classes at work. And I am in Drills and Assembly. I am studying to be a technician. By the way, Pioneer Industries was formed a few years ago and is seen mostly by people who have been in prison. There is around 50 of us from WCCW that work there. It is an opportunity for "change". They have a lot of programs that are truly good here if you really want to change your life for the better.

There is only one draw back here that I have encountered and that is the Dentist. He seems to just want to pull teeth. If you need a root canal, you can't get one. The tooth has to be pulled. If you have a tooth hanging too low, that has no cavities and is crooked, it can't be filed down and straightened, they want to pull it. And your teeth can't be cleaned unless they are deceased.

and gender oppression, as I emphasized above. The relationship between women and the prison system just as the relationship between men and prison is dictated by the same instruments of social control. However, women have usually been sent to prison for different reasons than men, and once in prison, experience different treatment than men. The role of women in prison usually reflects the role of women in society. Among women there are distinct differences in prison treatment based on race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, ability and sexuality. My objective is to write about these differences I've emphasized above against the backdrop of Patriarchy, Capitalism and White Supremacy based on my research, and my experiences working within prison and talking to women inmates.

Prison Without the Penitentiary

With the establishment of the United States came the establishment of Patriarchy, and the practice of social control and sexual disempowerment over women by the white wealthy male landowners who were writing the laws. Within the structure of Patriarchy, Christian Puritan definitions of gender enforced a social position on women as procreator or "helpmate" of man. For centuries prior to institutionalized imprisonment, women who were either challenging gender norms, illegitimate daughters, the physically "deformed", mentally "defective", or sexually "deviant," were forced into convents, nunneries, and monestaries, while the imprisonment of African American women in particular existed with slavery.

A General Look at the Beginning of Institutional Imprisonment

The actual establishment of the penitentiary didn't come into being until about 1820 in the state of New York. Both women and men were locked up in these institutions and shared the experience of filthy conditions and harsh treatment. However the numbers of women were few and the treatment was particular. Because there were no separate institutions for women, they

were often ignored within men's institutions, stashed away in separate wings or one room attics. A common occurrence that existed both within caged gates and outside, but even more rapidly inside, under constant social control, was the sexual abuse and rape of women by male guards. Nancy Kushan observes that sexual abuse was so acceptable that the Indiana state prison enforced the women to act as prostitutes for male guards. Sexual abuse was a norm within prison that brought pregnancy and the beating of pregnant women by male guards who wanted to "get rid" of the evidence. Women were and continue to be placed in institutions when they fight back against sexually/physically abusive partners. The reality of this vicious cycle of sexual dominance and abuse served and continues to serve as a warning to women that they stay silent and submissive to abusers or else they'll face more abuse without the possibility of escape or refuge.

Seperate and Unequal

With the rise of industry capitalism came the rise of the imprisonment of women and the need to establish separate women's prisons. Two types of institutions developed after 1870; custodial prisons and women's reformatories. One was interested in punishing women with slave labor, while the other punished women by reforming them with white Christian/Puritan upper-middle class ideals.

Women Reforming Women in the Patriarchy

The most influential women who lead the campaign for women reformatories "were for the most part middle-class or upper-middle-class women with both a strong desire to involve themselves in socially useful work and the free time." Most of the women who either led or supported the reform movement believed that they could "help" women, and were unaware of how their help was actually rooted in patriarchal tendencies of social control and missionary ways of thinking. They were interested in acting as role models for women so as to prepare them "to occupy

many haven't felt in a very long time. They have friendships built on factors other than "Who's got the drugs and how can I get some?"

Isn't it sad that the positive things we learn in prison can't be carried on to the real world when we leave? Is it any wonder people come back to prison when for some, prison has been the only positive things in their lives? Why aren't there programs to help these women when they leave here? They do their time, they learn to be good citizens by following rules and doing their best in school and at work, then they are unceremoniously dumped out the gate and left to fend for themselves. Need a place to live? Well, the waiting list for low-cost housing is two years long. Want to continue your sobriety? Again, the list for treatment is almost always at least a year long. What are they supposed to do while they wait? Where are they supposed to live? How can they try to get their kids back when they don't have a place to stay? Who will hire them with only basic skills? All of the good intentions in the world won't put food in the mouths of hungry women and children. Why do they go back to selling drugs? To survive, mostly to survive. Even if they don't intend to go back to using, it's pretty much inevitable. You'd have to be pretty strong, indeed, to be able to get through treacherous waters when the only islands of peace around are drugs or alcohol.

As hard as the rules at prison are to follow sometimes, they are better than no rules at all. How frightening, to go from a very structured setting like prison to total "free will", where you are responsible for your own success or failure. Is it surprising that so many fail?

In the state it costs \$102.48 per day to keep a woman in prison. Wouldn't it make more sense, and be more cost effective, to shorten the prison sentences and provide some kind of intensive aftercare? Give a woman some skills and some support outside of the prison setting. Help her to learn how to take care of herself. Help her to learn how to take care of herself. Help her to get her

13

These testimonies by three women prisoners in Washington state cannot represent the "voice of women in prison." They represent themselves based on their own experiences. Experiences range from state to state and can depend upon the crime, race, class, and sexuality/gender of the person incarcerated.

I am saddened to realize that, for a lot of women in prison, life is easier here, inside these walls, than outside. They have good friends here, they are warm, they have plenty to eat. Most have jobs from which it is pretty hard to get fired. Their kids are being taken care of, even if it's not by someone they would have chosen. Since the majority of the women at this institution are drug addicts, their forced sobriety gives them a feeling of health and well-being they haven't felt in years. In here, although the rules are sometimes subject to the whims of the staff, the main rules are pretty clear. Do what you're told, don't do what you are told not to do, and your life will be pretty much uneventful. On the streets, no matter how well you play the game, sometimes you lose, and you lose big. You may lose your house, your car, your friends. Or, if you don't follow the rules of the street, rules that are even more ambiguous than prison rules, you may even lose your life.

Many of the women here are getting an opportunity to learn for the first time in years. Maybe they dropped out of school because they didn't understand the lessons. Maybe life was too hard to bother with school. Maybe they were just having too much fun. Whatever the reason, many of them are enjoying learning new things. Whether it's basic reading and math, or office skills and drafting, they are learning the joys of increasing their knowledge. There are also classes on self esteem and anger management that benefit a lot of them. Some are learning basic skills for the first time in their lives. On the street, often their lives revolved around dope. Finding dope, getting dope, using dope, selling dope. Here their lives revolve around other, more positive things. They may have jobs that allow them to feel proud of themselves, a feeling

the position assigned to them by God, viz., wives, mothers and educators of children"(Rafter, 59). Women leading the reform movement rapidly gained a lot of support from the male prison administrators and political figures who all played a significant role in sustaining and strengthening a prison system based on classism, sexism, homophobia, and racism.

The popular racist notion that women of color weren't even people, particularly women, created standards for the women who went to reformatories that they predominately be white and incarcerated for public order offences(drunkenness, adultery). Women imprisoned within reformatories shared a privilege that women in custodial prisons didn't share. In reformatories women had an all female staff which reduced the threat of sexual abuse, they usually enjoyed fresh air and exercise, and were treated far better than women in custodial prisons. However, there was a harshness that lived in the regimen of reformatories; the goal was to reform women, not just punish, which meant that women were brainwashed for the most part to believe that they were on this earth to cook, clean and sew. It is also important to note that women in reformatories served more time than other men and women for the same crime.

Custodial Prisons: Slavery Re-legitimized

Nancy Kurshan observes that, "The women in the custodial institutions were black whether in the North or the South, and had to undergo the most degrading conditions." There were three kinds of custodial prisons in the United States: units attached to male prisons, separate institutions, and prison farm camps in the South. Most of the farm camps were said to have been former plantations, while practices were reflective of the control tactics used by overseers of slaves. You could also find the roots of a growing prison industry in prison camps and other custodial institutions where "reserve armies of labor" lived. Nicole Hahn Rafter notes that, "in many places prisoners were rented out to private entrepreneurs under various lease systems." The few white women who lived in prison camps served

as domestics. The majority who served time in these camps, were Black women and usually worked out in the fields. Neglect to health care was rampant among slave camps, and often "a number of prisoners died from a combination of malnutrition, overwork, and cruel punishments."

Coinciding prison camps, independent custodial prisons for women emerged in the Northeastern and Midwestern states. Conditions here violated every human right that has ever existed. Sexual and physical abuse was common, medical care wasn't an option, and facilities were unsanitary and crowded. Nancy Kurshan observes that, "the higher proportion of women of color in the prison population, the worse the conditions." The Women's Prison Association of New York (WPANY) had little interest in rehabilitation, the main objective was to keep women "incapable of rehabilitation" off the streets. The majority of women who were targeted for imprisonment were foreigners. Among foreigners, women of color were the primary targets. Other targets were poor white, black, native women who were considered "immoral, a danger to households, and a menace to the morals of sons and daughters" because of petty theft, property crimes, or prostitution (Rafter, 94). Primarily, the violent offenders who went to custodial prisons, were actually women defenders of abusive partners. Throughout history, women have primarily been forced into prison because they were trying to survive in a system that created as many laws as it could to prevent their self-determination and daily survival.

*Women inside prison and outside have resisted, rebelled and collectively moved to abolish and/or create alternatives to the prison system. I do not include these histories, but I encourage everybody to seek out this long line of resistance that has shaped today's prison abolition and reform movements.

State Population by race

In the state of Washington whites make up 88.5% of the population. Blacks make up only 3%, Native Americans are 1.6%, Asian/Pacific Islander are 4.3%, and "other" makes up 2.3%. These numbers are taken from the 1990 census.

The following is a breakdown of the women by race at Purdy:

white:	68.5%
Black:	24.9%
N.A.:	4.1%
Asian:	1.1%
"other":	1.4%

What do these numbers mean? Who is other? Why are Black and Native American women being locked up at a disproportionate number?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination obliges governments that have ratified it to eradicate racial discrimination in all areas of public life. The USA ratified the treaty in 1994. The treaty requires governments to periodically report on their implementation of its provisions. At the time of writing (February 1999). The USA has not submitted reports that were due in November 1995 and 1997. Articles 2-7 establish substantive obligations on governments; the US has made reservations on five of these six Articles (2, 3, 4, 5, and 7). Under Article 14, a country may make a declaration to permit individuals to complain that they have been a victim of a violation of a treaty right to the treaty monitoring body. The US has not made such a declaration.

-Amnesty International Report

more times per year.

Children in homes where domestic violence occurs are physically abused or neglected at a rate 1500% higher than the national average.

Children are present in 41-44% of homes where police intervene in domestic violence.

At least 53% of all battering husbands also batter their children.

75% of women surveyed in some studies report that their children had been physically and/or sexually abused by their batterers.

33% of teenage girls report physical violence from their date.

21-30% of college students report at least one occurrence of physical assault with a dating partner.

Between 25-45% of all battered women are abused during pregnancy.

In many U.S. cities, more than 50% of women and children seeking shelter are turned away due to lack of space.

An estimated 10% of incidents of domestic violence are reported.

The injuries that battered women receive are at least as serious as injuries suffered in 90% of violent felony crimes, yet under state laws, they are almost always classified as misdemeanors.

In some surveys, 90% of battered women who reported assault to the police actually did sign complaints, but fewer than 1% of the cases were ever prosecuted...

[facts compiled by the National Clearinghouse in Defense of Battered Women, Washington, D.C.]

On the next ten pages you will find a summary of information taken from the Amnesty International report "Not Part of My Sentence" on the current status of women in prison. This document is actually 100 pages and I have summarized into about 15. I found it to be the most recent information on the conditions of women in prison and some current legislative information. Unfortunately, this is really just an overview and some information is lacking, for example, the information on race only mentions black and latino women in comparison to white women. This leaves out whole other groups of women; asian, middle eastern, immigrant, and, indigenous women. It's analysis of women's socio-economic back ground is also fairly weak. Please keep this in mind while reading through the information. If you would like to see the full report and have internet access go to the Amnesty International website, which has a ton of info on many human rights issues.

Following this report there will be an interview/conversation that summer and i had with Chrystos and Ida Robinson two women who are actively involved with women in prison. After that there will be some information on Washington Corrections Center for Women aka Purdy along with some writings by women incarcerated there. Proceeding that will be resources on where to get more information on the growing prison crisis, the untold history of this country and how to get into prisons to be a volunteer.

The purpose of this zine is to get information out about women in prison in an accessible way, to get people interested in volunteering in prison and just to give a small picture of what is happening to people that are incarcerated. This is just a small amount of the information available on women in prison, we could have written a book, that's why we're going to give you some resources at the end so you can do your own independent research.

The rapidly growing number of incarcerated women

As of 1997 there were about 78,000 women who have been sentenced to imprisonment in federal and state prisons. They make up 6.4 percent of the prison population in the United States. County and city jails hold around 60,000 women. The number of incarcerated women in prisons and jails in the United States is approximately 10 times more than the number of women incarcerated in Western Europe whose combined female population is about the same size as that of the United States. In the past decade the increase in the number of women incarcerated in jails and prisons in the US has consistently exceeded the rate of increases of men being incarcerated in the US.

Crimes committed by women

In 1996 women comprised only 15 percent of people arrested for the most serious violent crimes (such as murder, rape, and robbery) and 20 percent of people arrested for less serious assaults. Keep in mind that women comprise over half the population in the United States. In 1996 women constituted 28 percent of people arrested for property crimes and 17 percent of people arrested for laws relating to illegal drugs. They were a majority (60%) arrested for "prostitution and commercialized vice".

In 1996 and 97 15% of women compared with 28% of men were in custody for violent crimes in jail. In state prisons 28 percent of women and 49 percent of men were convicted of violent crimes and in federal prisons 6 percent of women and 12 percent of men were convicted of violent crimes.

the lives of their children, and that many have stayed with abusive partners because they have been beaten trying to escape or because they rightly feared an attempt at escape would cause their partner to retaliate with violence.

Battered women who defend themselves are being convicted or are accepting pleas at a rate of 75-83% nationwide.

In about 85% of spouse assault and homicide cases, police have been called at least once before. In about 50% of those cases, police have responded five times to family violence incidents prior to the homicide.

Women in the U.S. are much less likely to commit homicide than are men. During the years 1980-84, women perpetrated only 14% of all homicides committed by those 15 years or older a homicide rate of 2.7. Men committed 86% of all these homicides, a homicide rate of 18.1.

Between 2.1 and 8 million women are abused by their partners annually in the U.S. At least every 15 seconds, a woman is beaten by her husband or boyfriend.

The Surgeon General has reported for at least 10 years that battering is the single largest cause of injury to U.S. women.

In national surveys, approximately 25% of U.S. couples report at least one incident of physical aggression between them during the course of their relationship.

Over 50% of all women will experience physical violence in intimate relationships. For about 25% of them, the battering will be regular and ongoing.

Women of all class levels, educational backgrounds, and racial, ethnic, and religious groups are battered.

Almost 90% of the hostage taking in the U.S. is domestic violence. Most hostages are the wives or female partners of hostage takers, although children are frequently taken hostage.

Abusive husbands and lovers harass 74% of employed battered women at work either in person or over the telephone, causing 56% to be late for work at least 5 times per month, 28% to leave early at least 5 days per month, 54% to miss at least 3 full days of work per month and 20% to lose their jobs.

47% of the husbands who beat their wives do so three or

Washington State Corrections Center for Women aka Purdy is located in Gig Harbor WA and is an all level prison for women. When I say all levels, I mean, that it houses Maximum, medium, minimum and some juveniles. In fact two weeks ago summer and I attended a volunteer training and the volunteer coordinator informed us that there is currently a 13 year old being housed at that prison...yeah, I really don't understand. Anyway we just wanted to give you some stats on who's there and who's not and what the majority of crimes are that are committed. As the Amnesty report states most women who are in prison are there for committing non violent crimes, well out of the 735 women currently at Purdy, 309 of them are in for drug violations, only 115 of them are in for violent crimes such as murder or manslaughter. Here's a list we found exposing the relationship between sexual and physical violence against women and the imprisonment of women.

Self Defense is not a Crime

Some Facts on Domestic Violence

Each day in the U.S., between 5 and 11 women are killed by a male intimate partner, between 1800 and 4000 per year.
In the U.S. women are more likely to be killed by their male intimate partners than all other homicide categories combined.
90% of women murdered are killed by men, men who are most often a family member, spouse or ex-partner.
There are hundreds of women in California prisons and thousands of women in prisons nationwide convicted of killing an abusive partner.
Studies show that the vast majority of women who kill their abusers do so as a last resort in defense of their own lives and/or

A 1991 national survey of women in prison stated that two thirds of the women serving time for a violent crime had victimized a relative an "intimate" (spouse, ex-spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend) or someone else they knew.

Race

The proportion of women who are incarcerated who are of racial or ethnic backgrounds greatly exceeds their representation in the general population. The rate of imprisonment of black women is more than eight times the rate of imprisonment for white women. The rate of imprisonment of hispanic women is nearly four times the rate of white women.

Class

National and state surveys have found that a majority of incarcerated women have relatively low levels of education and vocational skills and are not in the paid workforce. More than half (53%) of the women in prison and jail were unemployed at the time of their arrest; far more than men—32%.

Mothers in prison and the affects on their children

There are estimated to be more than 80,000 mothers among women in prison and jail and they have approximately 200,000 children under the age of 18. A majority of these women lived with their children before they went to prison.
Because women's prisons are often located in rural areas far from the cities in which many of them come from, maintaining contact with children becomes difficult, thus jeopardizing the prospects of successful reunification. A national study found that more than half of the children of women in prison did not visit their mothers. Many of these children are placed in foster care where the inability of imprisoned

mothers to meet court mandated family reunification requirements for contact and visitation with their children can result in termination of the mothers parental rights. Forty years ago thirteen states had laws allowing mothers in prisons to keep their infants with them. Over the next two decades a number of states repealed their laws.

In 1997-98 more than 2,200 women entered prison while pregnant and more than 1,300 babies were born in prison (22). In forty states babies are taken from their mothers almost immediately after birth or at the time the mother is discharged from the hospital. Exceptions are:

California: Community Mother Program has six community facilities where an eligible pregnant woman is housed and may remain with her infant from the time of birth to the end of incarceration. This program has 94 places -in 1997 436 women were incarcerated while pregnant and 381 babies were born to state female prisoners.

Illinois: *Qualified* inmates may be housed in a residential program for up to 24 months, The reality: there are 15 spaces available in the program and in 1997 120 pregnant women were incarcerated in Illinois state prisons and 51 babies were born to state female prisoners

New York: a woman may keep her baby for up to 12 months

Nebraska: a woman may keep her baby for up to 18 months

South Dakota: a woman may keep her baby for up to 30 days

In 1993 the US House of Representatives summarized the findings of research on the harm of separation of children from their mothers when they go to prison and the benefits

I: Bring some music, that will bring women in. Bring some latino music that' what I do when I go to the jail up there I bring some music that they would normally hear. I look and I bring music for the latino women.

I: Just be aware they are always going to put plants on you.

J: What do you mean?

I: There's always a snitch in the group to let them know what you are doing. To let them know what your doing and what your saying.

J: You mean the group that comes into the workshop?

I: Because every prison has there snitches, so always be aware that that's happening. The snitches want to see who you are, what your doing, making sure that your staying in code, making sure that your not doing anything illegal, don't leave an extra pen behind. they let em know who you are because they get privileges; they get extra cigarettes, they get to stay out a little bit later. They may even get to suck a few dicks in the closet.

J: That makes me want to throw up...I can't deal with that

I: Just be aware. You have no idea how things are infiltrated. If you study Cointelpro, if you study what they've done to our movements, if you study a lot how they dispersed the black panther party, the RNA and all these other groups...they entrap and frame people like leonard peltier, they see who you are. they keep documents on you. they've got your prints they've got your number don't believe that there not making a book on you right now.

power in a situation that means that their raping another prisoner, right? So how could you hold that person as a hero. So the issue of men's rape in prison is to me the first issue that has to be dealt with because if prisoners tacitly except rape that means when they go out that follows and that affects me as a woman. That's a really political issue for me. I would say that my experience in prison visiting is that the ghettos that exist in society exist in the prison and that the women's prison is often organized in that ghettoing system. Very few of white prisoners ever come to my workshops.

J: The majority of women that come to the workshop at Purdy are all white, there's two or three women of color in the writing workshop. The same thing happens at Shelton, who gets let into these education programs?

I: They sent the white boys up to Shelton the latino's, chicano's, and blacks went south.

C: The prison system in itself is racist it has white prisons and so on...

I: In 1987, 250 woman were sent from Dublin to Purdy and were forced to work and later on when they lost there contract with the feds, they put them in other places. They just went to different prisons because the state prisons have contracts with the feds to house them. What I noticed with the writing classes is first of all you have to be literate. A lot of people don't write...

C: The reason that my workshops are so mixed is that I don't expect people to write I call it a writing workshop but I also bring art supplies, so some people just draw. And the word goes out that I'm not going to make everybody stand up and read their stuff. The thing that was most interesting to me when I first went to a prison is that when I came back a second time everyone knew exactly who I was. That was very interesting to me. It doesn't get up to the guards. this ghastly reverend said I know the women really love you and that really made me nervous.

of mainating family ties:

- separation of children from their primary caretaker-parents can cause harm to childrens's pshychological well being and hinder their growth and development.
- many infants who are born shortly before or while their mothers are incarcerated are quickly separated from their mothers, preventing parent -child bonding that is crucial to developing a sense of security and trust in children
- maintaining close relationships with their children provides a powerful incentive for prisoners to participate in and successfully benefit from rehabilitative programs
- maintaing strong family ties during imprisonment decreases recidivism. (the percentage of people that go back to prison)

The summary of this research was incorporated in legislation allowing for the establishment of projects to promote the maintenance of family ties between parents in prison and their children. This legislation was passed in 1994 specifying \$20 million dollars could be spent on the projects between 1996-2000. Since this law was enacted congress has failed to allocate money to implement this legislation.

The impact of the "war on drugs" on women

Since the 1980's federal and state government criminal justice authorities have increased efforts to detect and prosecute people who violate drug laws abd legislatures required courts to impose harsher penalties. This so called "war on drugs" has resulted in a massive increase in the number of people who are imprisoned and the length of their sentence.

From 1986 to 1996 the number of women sentenced to state prison for drug crimes increased ten fold (from around 2, 370

to 23,700). The imprisonment of women for drug crimes has been the main element in the overall increase in the imprisonment of women.

The number of women imprisoned for drug offences in state prison systems doubled between 1990 and 1996. Nationally one in three women in prison and one in four women in jail are incarcerated for violating a drug law.

Pointing to the link between substance abuse and the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse among women, one study concludes that "the war on drugs has succeeded only in criminalizing women already suffering under extreme socioeconomic and psychological stress".

The harsh penalties being imposed on so many people convicted of violating drug laws has given rise to a number of concerns among various people including judges, legislators, people working in welfare and human rights organizations. One concern is that the penalties appear excessive for the nature of the crime, particularly where the conduct involves possession of drugs for personal use rather than sale.

Another concern is that restrictions on the sentencing discretion of judges with respect to people convicted of violating drug laws adversely affect many women. Women often have a very subordinate role in drug dealing and may have little information to offer in order to be eligible for more lenient sentences imposed on people who assist the police and prosecution. Women may also participate in drug crimes because they are under pressure from a man with whom they are in a relationship.

Myrna Reader studied the "gender-neutral" federal sentencing guidelines and concluded that the sentencing model placed women at a distinct disadvantage with respect to gender-specific characteristics, experiences, and roles. The

her to watch the back so that this could happen in a way where nobody felt that they could do something and it wouldn't be the lone hijacker up there. So that's how I got involved in the hijacking. So we wound up not making it to Algeria, we wound up making it to Cuba because the plane didn't have enough fuel to make it to Algeria. We let everybody off at LAX (L.A. airport) The only people that were taken were the pilot, co-pilot, and a few stewardesses, who had been on the plane. So we said we'll go to Cuba then.

J: What year was this?

I: '72', then I just got off and went to Cuba. I had had a lot of friends who had been on the Vincent Ramos brigade which is a collective of young people that go down to Cuba and cut cane, they work. they usually stay three or six weeks. So I had known about Cuba and had known people who had gone there. In Cuba is where I met and consider real revolutionaries. People who entered the country illegally like I did but who were there for bombings, shootings, running for their lives from revolutionary activity, not from other stuff.

J: So you were there for four years, until 1976 the year I was born, remember we talked about that?

I: Yeah, I was there from 72 to 76.

J: I'm curious there's this guy at the men's prison that I work at who talks a lot about three different classes of people in prison, the first class is the murderer, the robbers, the people that didn't snitch and there looked at as heroes. The second class are the people who snitch...so I'm curious does that exist in the women's prison?

C: First of all I have to comment that is a very apolitical analysis of prison on his part. It also does not address one of the chief issues in men's prisons as far as I'm concerned which is rape of other prisoners. Generally speaking, if someone has the most

J: I think it, either is the first or the third time or something like that, that's what I heard. I'm not really sure. But the number is definitely small.

C: Could you find that out for me?

J: sure (I haven't done that yet...oops)

C: As far as I know that is the first time...

I: First time in my memory...

J: So, Ida why did you hijack the plane? Can you talk about that?

I: Yeah, yeah I can. It was really one of those things. Meaning that I thought I was going to Los Angeles and then I was with someone and we weren't going to Los Angeles. So i'm thinking that the plane is going to Los Angeles to meet the other comrades. We were taught to not ask a lot of questions. So, I really didn't know until we got up in the plane that we weren't going to L.A. and a lot of it coming from my inability to say no, to leave a person that I had feelings about. I didn't know how to say fuck you at nineteen years old, like I do now. I couldn't distinguish between gangsterism and revolutionary activity because all black men I hung around with had guns, all black men I hung with was doing stuff that your not supposed to question them about it because if you don't know you can't talk about it. There was this air of secrecy about what the activities were. It wasn't until I as up in the airplane that I found out we were going to Algeria. I had to either participate or not participate. And I felt it safer because at the time I had a little baby, and I said if they do something with somebody else here on this plane with guns and shit there's going to be some shooting and we are all going to die. So I said fuck it I'll help you. He opened up his brief case gave me his thirty eight, he had the sawed off shot gun, he went to the back took the stewardess by the hair walked her to the cockpit . I took the other stewardess and I sat her down asked

policy did not allow the court to consider factors such as the role of single mothers, the minor role that women play in crime, and the abusive/coercive environments in which many women play roles.

Sexual abuse of women in prison

Introduction

Many women in prisons and jails in the US are victims of sexual abuse by staff, including sexually offensive language, male staff touching inmates' breasts and genitals when conducting searches; male staff watching inmates while they are naked and rape. The majority of complaints of sexual abuse by female inmates against staff men are reported to be the perpetrators. Prisons and jails in the US employ men to guard women and place relatively few restrictions on the duties of male staff. When officers conduct themselves in ways that violate institutional rules and criminal laws, the victim is often reluctant to complain because she may have good reason to anticipate that her accusation is less likely to persuade investigations than the denial of an officer: she may also fear retaliation.

The seriousness of prevalence of sexual abuse in six jurisdictions Further evidence is provided by the following reports

International standards and US law in relation to sexual abuse

International standards provide that:

- female prisoners should be attended and supervised only by female officers:
- male staff such as doctors and teachers may provide profes-

sional services in female facilities, but should always be accompanied by female officers.

Thus, the employment of men is in violation with international standards.

Men form a disproportionate amount of the staff in prisons and jails where women are incarcerated in the US. In a 1997 survey of prisons in 40 states it found that on average 41 percent of the correctional officers working with female inmates are men. In the United States courts have ruled that anti-discrimination employment laws mean that prisons and jails cannot refuse to employ men to supervise female inmates or women to supervise male inmates. There are various reasons as to why men are permitted to be staffed in women's prisons: court decisions, legislation and the policies of jail and prison authorities. Different states have different rules, for example in Vermont prisons a labor union contract specifically forbids assignments on the basis of gender, which is based on economic purposes. (like dues and such for the unions)

In the context of "pat" searches or "pat frisks" courts have taken different views about the legitimacy of male staff conducting these searches. These searches require contact with the genital area. Here in the state of Washington a court decided that searches of women in prison by male staff amounted to cruel and unusual punishment, in violation of the US constitution. Many of the women in this prison had been subjected to physical and sexual abuse prior to their incarceration and they and experts testified that pat searches by men would traumatize them because it constituted continuation of the abuse.

Response to complaints of sexual abuse

In the United States jails and prison systems have various

away. The things that I am focused on are not necessarily what the prisoners are focused on. It's like for me when they said to me the rule is that you can only have three books I was devastated, I'm still devastated over that. They told me that five years ago. I could not conceive as an intellectual to being reduced to only three books and that is a constant question in my mind, which three books would I keep as my property? I haven't been able to figure it out. Probably one of them would be Reinventing the Enemy's Language, which is that anthology of native women's voices. It would have to be some kind of anthology. The other part of it that was so funny to me, was that if you can only have three books then you'll have to get the three biggest books you can get. The other part that really freaked me out was that they cannot keep a journal that is private. How I have gotten as sane has been through writing in a journal that no one else could see. Because we live in a world where we really do not have any friends, we have acquaintances we have people that we sleep with, but in the sense that I mean of friends colonization won't allow us to have friends. It will not absolutely not allow us to bond in that kind of way they do things with time with work. Us being able to sit at this table and talk and say what we really feel is a fucking luxury it's a luxury. Most human beings won't even get to do this ever.

S: Well, yeah why is that I can do this with you all, and I can't do this with my mom or my brother...

C: Because they are socially constructed. The thing is part of how you end up in prison is by not obeying your social construct, by stepping outside of what you supposed to be doing. For instance if some drunk white man tries to rape you and you murder him you have stepped out of your social construct. Especially if you a native woman or a black woman, or any "minority" woman. Ida and I were trying to figure this out the other night. You now this white guy who has been given the death penalty for the murder of the man in Texas. We think that that might be the first time a white man has ever been given the death penalty for killing a black man. I really want to know.

see...I think it is very, very...well the prison system, if I can say this is an s/m world. There are people that have total dominance and total power, and they run what happens, then there are the people that try to appease them who are the prisoners. The whole prison system locks you in, I mean I think that...like one of the things that the prisoners have said to me, in which I've noticed myself, is that good guards don't last. They don't last and the same thing was true in the nuthouse, the good technician lasts a good eight months maximum. In other words, I meet someone whose coming into this with the idea that there going to help these people and try and be decent to them, they don't last.

J: And they fire them or something, they get rid of them...?

C: A lot of those technicians ended up in the nuthouse themselves.

J: What are the technicians...?

C: They are the guards in the nuthouse, their not nurses or anything their just the people who sedate people, put people in solitary confinement, walk around. I think that that s/m component of the prison system is why people who last in the prison system as guards stay, because they become addicted to that sadistic power. Even the people that I've come across that might be nicer then some of the others, I can still see their addictions to power in their dealings with me because what they try to do is make me be the same as them, and I'm the same as the prisoners. So their always uncomfortable and disconcerted around me, I almost never have had the same guard be willing to escort me and I try to be really friendly and nice to them because I feel like if I make a friend with a guard I've got more help in what I want to do.

C: I think the thing that's most distressing to me about working in the prison is that I have absolutely no power to make their lives easier, none, that's so frustrating. I would like to be able to get a law enacted that women have the right to privacy and write whatever they wanted in their journals, and books cannot be taken

mechanisms for dealing with complaints of sexual abuse and other forms of ill-treatment, for example:

- investigation and action by personnel within the facility where abuse has been reported
- investigation and action by personnel of the authority responsible for the facility where the abuse has been reported (Department of Corrections)
- referral of allegations of criminal conduct to the police and general criminal prosecutorial agencies

Prisoners, lawyers, and other sources say that prisoners are often reluctant to complain, for a variety of reasons, including:

- the difficulty of proving an allegation, particularly when the only evidence is the prisoners account
- a prisoner who makes a complaint may be placed in protective segregation while the complaint is investigated; prisoners have said they find this punitive
- fear of retaliation

A woman can only use prison or jail complaints procedures to complain about treatment that breaches institutional policies. She cannot use these procedures to complain about being searched or being watched while naked by male guards if these activities were conducted in a manner that conforms with the policy of the jail or prison in which she is held. Then her only recourse is to challenge the legality of the policy in court, a remedy which is complex and can take years to invoke.

The Use of Restraints

In the United States, jails and prisons use restraints on

incarcerated women when the women are being transported to and kept in the hospital. In October of 1998 a woman in an Illinois state prison was handcuffed to a hospital bed for surgery and was shackled to her bed when she woke from the anesthetic. According to reports such as this, jails and prisons in the United States use restraints on women as a matter of course, regardless of whether a woman has a history of violence (which only a minority have), regardless of whether she has ever absconded or attempted to escape, and regardless of her state of consciousness. Exceptions are made if a doctor asks on medical grounds, there have been reports of cases where a doctor was not present to request the removal of restraints in circumstances where approval would generally have been given or a guard with a key was not immediately available. The use of restraints on women who are about to give birth endangers the woman and her child. Dr. Patricia Garcia states:

Women in labour need to be mobile so that they can assume various positions as needed and so they can quickly be moved to an operating room. Having the woman in shackles compromises the ability to manipulate her legs into the proper position for necessary treatment. The mother and baby's health could be compromised if there were complications during delivery, such as hemorrhage or decrease in fetal heart tones.

In a recent national survey 20 of the 52 state, city, and federal corrections departments that responded reported that they have specific policies or procedures for the physical control and transportation of pregnant inmates.

prisons...

C: What do you mean by that? (to summer)

I: Well initially prisons were not for women of color, they were for white women who didn't mind there husbands, who got drunk. they were for white women. After all we weren't people...

J: We weren't women, we weren't anything...

I: We were slaves and we were probably killed if we did something wrong, so that...

C: We were doing things like being on the trail of tears and all that, or boscodondo or any number of genocidal movements off of our original land. We were just killed if we got in someone's way. I think that's true for african american descent people too, you were killed if you were in somebody's way. Why would they pay for you to go and get three square meals a day that you'd never had before in your life.

S: Look what happened when slavery ended...

I: When slavery ended that's when the prison system began. The men, the black men, went to prison because that way, that's where the thirteenth amendment thing comes in, that way they can continue to become enslaved by serving a prison sentence. If you look at the numbers of what happened in those years, supposedly it (slavery) ended on paper and then it was picked up by the prison system...

J: How convenient...

C: The thing I think that's really important about prisons is that they function as the thing to scare people with. Every time I go into the prison I'm still scared. I'm really frightened of the guards. Partially the reason I'm frightened of the guard is because I can

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Who goes to college and who can't. what college does to you, because I know a number of working class women like myself who have passed through college and who now have middle class ideals, their feelings the way they act and the way they speak. Part of the reason that I keep stating in my biographical stuff all the time that I'm self-educated is that it's very important to me to say "I have this brain all on my own work" nobody gave it to me. I made this muscle be a muscle and a lot of the times when I'm in an academic setting I can't tell you how many times I've tried to have an intellectual conversation with someone and been stunned when they were stunned when they realized I was capable of that, it's deep. Particularly with male professors. I'm trying to be nice and polite and engage them on their subject. Since I read more then I do anything else, I'm really widely read, I know about Victorian poets and all kinds of stuff. So, I'll say something to some english professor about what did he think about this part of shakespeare or this use of the language and all that and one of them said to me "can I get you a cup of tea?", which I thought was one of the most interesting put-downs that I've ever gotten in my life. In prison you discover yourself, that's what happens, you discover how real you are or how not real you are. When you do prison work you either have to get real or get out because you can't function. When I say that prison is soul death that's what it's purpose is, the purpose of prison, particularly women's prison is to break the spirit of the women it's not to reform them, it's none of that stuff, it is to break their spirit and make them be passive women. That's what the purpose of mental hospitals are for women and that's what the purpose of prison is, they want us to be passive and not be angry, to not have an opinion not demand our rights. *My opinion is what colonization says about women is shut the fuck up and role over. that's it, it does not have any other use for women. it doesn't value our minds it doesn't value anything...*

S: There's also a difference between women of color and white women. what I've noticed going into purdy it's like...well just the history of women's prisons in general, especially women's prison as reform. the whole difference of privilege that exists within

These states are:

Colorado. Connecticut, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington (state), Wisconsin and the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. In 38 of these systems medical personnel are involved in evaluating individual cases prior to the restraint in pregnant women. However there have been states that have violated this law.

Some authorities in the United States use chains or leg irons, restraints that are prohibited by international standards. The following are some of the other ways that incarcerated women are restrained: The restraint chair, specifically in Sacramento County jail between 1995 and 1997. The chair was used to torture and ill treat more then a dozen inmates. A disproportionate number of the victims were women and women of color. Many of the victims had masks held over their faces. They were denied bathroom facilities, food and water, and were subjected to taunts and sexually derogatory remarks by the guards.

Another way of restraining or controlling inmates is with the use of electro shock devices. In one case there was a report that at Muncy Prison in Pennsylvania in 1996 an "Electric Body Immobilizer Shield" was used against a prisoner who was in distress after she was informed of the scheduled date of her execution. Authorities responded by saying that the device was used because the woman "was displaying significant injurious behavior and was refusing all orders given by the supervising commissioned officer". For more info on this see the full amnesty international report.

Status of health care of women in prison

Many women find that they are in need of medical attention while they are incarcerated, in fact because so many women enter prison ill or pregnant, health care is a necessity. Inter-

national standards specify that medical care must be provided whenever necessary, free of charge. The US supreme Court has also ruled that inmates have a right to adequate medical care for serious medical needs.

Various studies show that the health of incarcerated women is generally worse than that of women in the general population, reflecting the fact that women in prison are more likely to be affected by factors such as poverty, harmful substance abuse, and risks arising from exchanging sex for drugs or money. In prisons the number of HIV-positive women has increased by more than 88% since 1991. Women in prison use health care more than men for a myriad of reasons including pregnancy and a higher incidence of sexually transmitted disease including HIV.

Many women in prison have had a history of physical and mental abuse as children and as adults. Because of this, prior to incarceration, the physical and mental health of women inside is poor. According to a 1996 national jail survey, 48% of female inmates and 13% of male inmates reported having been sexually or physically abused or both prior to admission.

Other factors have been cited as contributing to a large number of people with mental health disorders being imprisoned in jails and prisons. These include

- insufficient mental health services in the community
- the massive increase in the incarceration of women convicted of violating drug laws, many of whom have a history of drug abuse
- stresses associated with incarceration- as well as the deprivation of liberty faced by all inmates, loss of family contact, termination of parental rights and overcrowding.

Concerns about adequacy of health care

struggles. The other thing that prison has taught me is that, I spent my entire life believing that I was a victim and that I had nothing because this society had taught me that I was an indian and whore, it taught me that I had nothing and so I had this whole concept of myself as a victim and no power. What I saw in prison, and ida, was one of the people that I first saw this in. When I first saw ida, it was like this burst of incredibly intense light and for the first time I had this sensation of my own power and that power had nothing to do with being poor, or being indian, or being brown, or being abused, that I was not a victim at all that I was a very, very powerful person. I felt ida as a very powerful person and Abby as a very powerful person and Brenda and Janet in their own ways as very powerful people. Some of the white women that I've had to deal with in doing prison work have been very difficult for me to get along with. Part of that difficulty is...

J: wait in the prisons or people on the outside?

C: Outside people, and part of that is that they have a very rigid definition of what a prisoner of war is or what a political prisoner is. *From my standpoint, as an indian woman, every indian that is in prison is a prisoner of war.* There's no other way to construct that. *Also all african american people that were brought here as slaves are prisoners of war.* I have a very different take on that whole thing, and I see very little difference in writing checks for money you don't have to feed your kids then blowing up the bia building (the bureau of indian affairs). *prison is a political issue, it is a political institution. it's very foundation is a political institution.* who is considered bad, who goes to prison who goes to the nuthouse. Who's the white guy who tried to kill the president? He went to the nuthouse, not to prison. There's this whole way, in which from my point of view, you cannot look at prisons or nuthouses or any institutions, indeed you can't even look at colleges and not see them as a political institution. When you see things like colleges invest in south africa and in prisons and all the trouble we had in trying to get them to divest from south africa. The university of washington never did divest from south africa.

holiday and I didn't get caught. I felt a profound recognition that I could be there. *The other thing that I felt was that these were indigenous women who had the most traumatic situation, the least resources, these were the people that nobody cared about, really literally no one cared about. there was no defense committee fund for them. there were no lawyers, no one cared if they stayed there for the rest of their lives.* They were far from their families they had no money, they had no visits. and the way that my father raised me was that always be aware of those that have less then you, and that it's your responsibility to help try and take care of those that have less then you. there was just a bond there. in fact when they wouldn't let me in the prison this last time my heart was broken. I was hysterically crying and upset and the women called me. they used there prison commissary, tiny funds, to call me and they were consoling me because I couldn't come into see them. it was just so deep for me...

J: See there's that ...

C: One of the most important concepts I'm struggling with lately is paradox. If colonization, which is a horrible disease, had not happened we wouldn't be able to talk to each other. So I wouldn't be a poet, so it's like there's this horrible, terrible thing that has happened and this is the other thing that has been good, that we can talk to each other. That's the same way I feel about prisons. There's this horrible thing, yet when people are stripped of dignity and privacy and all that the human spirit fills up the emptiness or the space. I'm not saying that all the women I come across are good...there are some women that I have met when I've gone to prison who hit another prisoner or lie, or scam, or are abusive to people and all that, that's... human beings are human beings. the women that I have become close to have just been incredibly inspiring to me. *One of the things that I think prison has taught me, is that I need to figure out how to move through the world with love no matter what, and not christian love and not passionate love, none of that stuff, I mean with respect for other human beings and with tenderness towards and compassion for their*

In 1992 a paper issued by national health care organizations warned that standards of health care for men and women in prison were becoming increasingly difficult to meet because resources were not increasing in proportion to the increase in the number of people incarcerated with significant health problems. Many reports state that the problems have worsened in many institutions. They include inadequate access to health services, failure to refer seriously ill inmates for treatment and delays in treatment or failure to deliver life-saving drugs for inmates with HIV/AIDS. The National Commission on Correctional Health Care has indicated that the provision of gynecological services for women in prison was inadequate. A recent survey of all state prison systems found that all reported that they offer obstetric and gynecological services but does not report on their adequacy. In a survey that was taken a year earlier only half of the systems stated that they offered female specific services such as mammograms and Pap smears.

Lack of Resources

The most commonly cited barrier to adequate health care in prisons is that there are too few health care staff to meet the health care needs of the growing number of incarcerated women. One reason that has been cited is that the increase in the incarceration of women has been greater than authorities have expected plus the difficulties in attracting and retaining medical staff to work in jails and prisons in general.

Lack of treatment for substance abuse

The war on drugs has been a major contributor to the increase of incarcerated women and men for violating drug laws. Among this groups and many other offenders are large numbers of people who have used and abused legal and illegal drugs.

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Substance Abuse and Treatment, Prisoners 1997.				
	State		Federal	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Had used drugs regularly* (%) * once a week for more than at least a month	40	69	47	58
Used drugs at time of offence (%)	40	32	19	23
Alcohol or drug-involved prisoners treated for substance abuse since admission to prison (%)	20	14	13	12

The US Congress has authorized the provision of funds to assist state and local correctional facilities in developing

door and say "okay bitch, out with you". I don't know how to be comfortable.

C: I think that what happened is that someone took me to a pow-wow. I got involved with the defense group for norma jean croy, that's how I met bo (chrystos' girlfriend). no, wait, I remember how it happened. somebody, I don't remember who, called me up and asked me to perform for sparks fly to raise money for the prisoners. so I went there and performed to raise money for the prisoners and that's how it started.

J: How long ago was that?

C: Seven years ago I guess. The first way I came into it was being a cultural worker raising money. Then I became very interested in the whole issue. I got active on the norma jean croy committee and was working for her release which we managed to do. I think that at some point someone said to me would you like to go out to the prison and meet the women and I said yes. Actually the women who were organizing it were expecting me to meet linda evans, that was the idea is that I was going to meet linda evans and the other political prisoners. Linda is a very interesting person in that she understood that I was native. She went immediately to the four winds club and said this woman is coming would you like to come Linda was responsible for hooking me up with the four winds club in the beginning and she's actually been very respectful, she tends to come to our things and fade out, she's someone that sincerely tries to grasp what racism is and how it destroys people and she's working to undo that. She's learned spanish and so on and she helps some of the spanish speaking women do translation and so on. She's doing her best in the circumstances. So, there I met the women in the four winds club and I fell in love, and that falling in love was a kind of recognition that if my own life had taken a little different turn here or there that I would be there in FCI Dublin (a women's prison in california). I still feel that to this day that because I was a drug dealer when I was a young woman and it just so happens that when they busted everyone else I was in big sur on

Lack of Counseling Services

Jails and Prisons provide services only for what are considered to be the most acute mental health disorders and commonly are unable to provide treatment other than medication. In women's prisons in Illinois, Michigan and California psychotropic medication is often prescribed because other forms of treatment such as psychotherapy are not available. Dr. Terry A. Kupers, a California psychiatrist states:

"Many prison mental health services are limited to a psychiatrist who visits periodically to prescribe strong ant-psychotic medications. There may also be a few psychologists who spend most of their time administering psychological tests for courts and the parole board and nurses who barely have time to evaluate emergency cases and pass out pills. But there is no place for a woman who has been massively traumatized and feels depressed or angry to talk through her traumatic memories in a therapeutic setting." (Look for Kupers book; Prison Madness- The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars and What We Must Do About It)

Kupers warns that unless facilities are able to actively identify women who have been abused and to provide services to assist them, these women are more likely to leave jails and prisons and return to the kinds of abusive relationships that led them to prison in the first place. (Of course that's what the government wants, all women, especially women of color to be locked up. Then we can't produce and more children and white supremacy will flourish.)

The use of non-medical staff in some correctional systems is a continuing problem. In a number of prisons inmates must obtain the permission of non-medical staff in order to be attended by a doctor. In 1995 in an investigation by the US Department of Justice into Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women in Alabama, the Justice department was highly critical of the

C: the other part of all that is that the good girl/bad girl thing is, if you've been comfortable when you grew up, not necessarily financially comfortable, but that nobody has really bothered you, you haven't been challenged, you have an addiction to being comfortable, therefore you do not want to deal with class, race with politics, with anything because you would much rather continue being comfortable right? *it's an addiction to be comfortable.* If your like me, and you've never had comfort for a moment in your life, you have no interest in comfort. When I get in a situation where for instance when I went to yale university...it was a scream.

J: What did you do there?

C: I spoke, I did a reading. They had this huge yale library and all of these professors came up to me and shook my hand. what was really funny was that I was in a bad mood that day where I had had this woman do this racist thing to me on the plane and I got up and read nothing but mad stuff. it was like bam, bam, bam,....one right after another. I didn't read any pretty stuff.. no love poetry nothing. The president comes up to me afterwards and this is literally what he does: he takes my hand and he's got this limp deadfish handshake and he says thank you for a very nice evening. I was like "were you here honey?" Afterwards I had this big reception, and since I don't drink I'm always going to these receptions and being the only sober person in the whole place which is really depressing you know. There drinking and eating there wine and cheeses and I'm just sort of standing there and there blabbering on and I'm trying to be polite and you know I'm sober. They put me in one of those hotels with the ankle breaking carpet and just posh, there was a little mint on the pillow. There was a bathrobe there that I could use. it was deep you know. they had room service, I could order anything I wanted to eat. so this is an experience when I'm supposed to feel comfortable because I'm having all my material needs met and there giving me this money and bah, bah, bah. *I was profoundly uncomfortable.* I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop, when is somebody going to burst through the

obstacle to medical access created by the use of non-medical staff. Below is the process of getting an appointment with a doctor:

"To get an appointment with the doctor, inmates must first sign up for sick call during mealtime. Sick call takes place in the middle of the night and is primarily a screening process conducted by unsupervised and unqualified staff. These staff who have no training in triage (assessment of urgency) and do not follow written protocols, decide on their own whether an inmate may see the doctor the next day. The process means that an inmate may have to wait days before she can get any medication of any kind—even a simple aspirin. The consequences are more serious for inmates with severe medical attention."

Charges for medical attention

In violation of international standards which require free medical attention for people incarcerated, many prisons and jails charge inmates for medical attention. In California prisoners are required to pay \$5 in order to receive attention from a doctor, nurse or a dentist. There are exemptions for specified circumstances and for prisoners who don't have the money for the fee. Authorities say that the charges are a reasonable measure to deter prisoners from seeking medical attention unnecessarily, i.e. for minor matters or because they want to avoid work. Prisoners interviewed by Amnesty International said that the payment requirement is a signifi-

hospitals. I mean, in my opinion, they actually are sisters right? or brothers or whatever the hell you want to call it. They are connected to each other because the ultimate thing is that women are controlled in our society by the issue of whether they are a "good" woman or a "bad" woman. There's various ways to punish what are so called bad women. From a very young age I was a bad woman, right? Actually when I was really little I was passive, very withdrawn because I was being beaten and all that kind of stuff. I was very quiet and always trying to do the right thing. when I got sexually abused, starting when I was eleven, as often happens with young girls I became very, acting out. you know I started stealing. I started beating boys up, just you know I was wild, you could not control me, and I've never stopped being that way. the issue of being violated in that way, like that over a long period of time, my uncle violated me for ten years. when I finally could get out of that situation, I was pretty gone, I didn't have much...there weren't very many people in my life as a young girl who cared whether I lived or died, quite frankly. and that's true for most indian girls right? so, I was always politically active after that point as well as in trouble active. it's like when I was thirteen when I first marched against segregated schools in San Francisco. When I tell people that their shocked, they say there weren't segregated schools in s.f. and I'm like there are still segregated schools in San Francisco.

J: Well and that's the whole thing there's this facade that segregation and racism ended when the civil rights movement happened.

I: Who thinks that?

J: I think a lot of people think that. I think a lot of white people think that.

I: Because it's convenient for them to do it...

J: Exactly!

I: Because that way they don't have to think about anything else or their racism...so it's another denial some cop-out thing.

3 /

describe it because it's hard to describe those sorts of things...

Chrystos: What I think of prison work as, is first of all it's a way to keep your ego in check. in this society we live in, we live in a really perverse society which includes and encourages everyone to have as big an ego as possible and to be as overwhelming to people as possible and to be really disgusting right? so, when you go into prison the very experience of the physical construct of prison immediately reduces your ego because they have the keys, they have the power, you have nothing. even if your not a prisoner your immediately reduced...

J: I think about that all the time, I pretty much don't have anything when I go in there at all...

Summer: You talked about smiling, putting on this facade...

J: God that's fucking annoying...

J: What got you started in working in prisons chrystos?

C: well I worked for over twenty years on Leonard Peltiers case, so I was aware for a long time of the injustice of the system and um...let me think back. How did I first start working in prison?

I: That's interesting...that's not a question I think of and I'll tell you why. We grew up in a time where you had to get involved in some type of struggle and it was just not a question...

C: Right and it was just mostly picking your struggle...

I: right...so that's why it's an interesting question...

C: I know that my experience in mental hospitals was so traumatic that I can't do work about mental hospital stuff, I just can't it just makes me nuts, I get scared. Prison was just like a sister to mental

cant deterrent for women who have a small amount of money.

In some states private companies have been contracted to provide health services in prison. According to reports, some investigations have found that inmates have died because essential medical services were restricted to save money. In 1996 Melody Bird, an inmate in Pinellas County Jail in Florida complained of serious chest pains and difficulty breathing. Nurses at the jail believed that she was having a heart attack but could not call for an ambulance without prior approval from the medical director of the company contracted to provide health care services at the jail. They contacted the medical director but did not receive permission to call an ambulance for thirteen hours. Melody Bird died before reaching the emergency room.

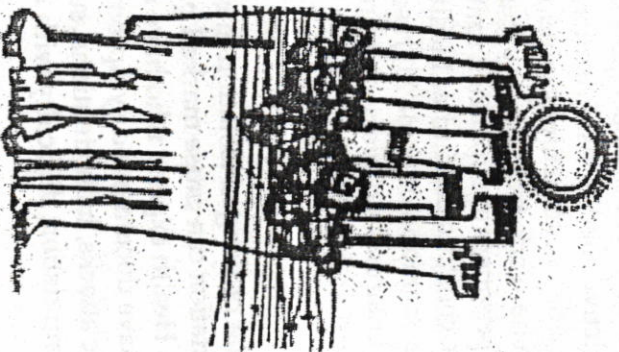
Supermaximum Security Facilities

In the past few years many states have built "super maximum security" prisons designed to house prisoners in long term isolation in restrictive conditions. Prisoners may be confined for 24 hours a day in sometimes windowless cells with solid doors, with no work, training or other programs. The large majority of prisoners in supermax unites are men but several states have constructed similar facilities for women prisoners. The operation of some high security units for women violates standards on privacy and human dignity, as the women are able to be observed at all times by male guards.

Studies have shown that prolonged isolation in conditions of reduced sensory stimulation can cause marked psychological and physical harm. Health experts who have examined prisoners in isolation have documented symptoms including acute anxiety and panic attacks, hallucinations, sudden violent outbursts, self-mutilation, difficulty with concentra-

tion and memory, deteriorating vision and weight loss.

US authorities have defended the use of supermax facilities as being necessary to control extremely violent or disruptive prisoners. Yet many of the inmates assigned to high security units do not appear to fit these criteria, or to warrant such an extremely punitive environment. In many states, mentally ill or disturbed prisoners are held in supermax units, despite evidence that the conditions are likely to exacerbate disorders and lead to psychosis.



This is a conversation with Ida McCray Robinson and Chrystos. For those of you who are not familiar with these women, here's some information. Chrystos is a native American, lesbian poet who has written about 8 or ten books of awesome poetry. She is an avid native rights and prison activist. Ida is an ex political prisoner who now has an organization called Families With A Future based in the Bay Area. The organization tries to help children whose parents are incarcerated visit them in prison. If you want more information, Families w/A future info will be on our resources page, along with a list of Chrystos poetry.

This interview/conversation took place over a very animated, fun, afternoon at a local restaurant in Olympia. We talked about a lot of stuff, including women in prison. I really wanted to get the opportunity to have a conversation with these two women, who, because they are women of color, their voices are rarely heard. The conversation moves around a lot, so please bear with us, it's still interesting!

Just a couple of notes. When Chrystos talks about working in prison she is talking about working in FCI Dublin, a women's prison in California, she does not work at Purdy in the state of Washington.

Ida: The women who come to prison from Wisconsin, honey they are carrying so much time because we have some pc's there.

Jenn: What's that?

I: Women who are there for protective custody with the feds because they either had a co-defendency in the regular state prison or they snitched on somebody whatever...I don't know so they just have lots and lots of time...

J: so, I kind of just want to talk about prisons. last night I guess when you said that thing about it (working in prisons) being spiritual, that really hit me hard. I don't know in what way it's spiritual for me, going to prisons, but it's changed my life and I can't really